

JAZZ ON JAY RETURNS TO DOWNTOWN SCHENECTADY

In a music scene rich in free summer shows, Jazz on Jay has stood out for its decades of welcoming audiences to shows by top regional artists.

The 2025 season has something for everyone, ranging from the modern jazz of the Dylan Canterbury Quintet on June 5 to the acoustic fusion of Chuck Lamb Trio featuring Ria Curley on Aug. 28.

“We welcome you to enjoy another fabulous season that celebrates jazz, the music genre that originated in the African American communities of New Orleans and now encompasses a wide range spanning more than 100 years,” said Lanaea Bailey, who chairs the Jazz on Jay selection committee.

Performances range from familiar standards to creative innovations, and hybrid styles from classical to international and pop-soul. The music is often so striking that surprised lunch-bound office workers stop in their tracks to enjoy the sounds.

IT'S A SPECIAL SERIES IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE.

“I have cherished the opportunity to share these performances with my own family, fostering their appreciation for live music and the exceptional talent that thrives in our area,” said saxophonist Brian Patneaude, the inaugural Eddies Award winner for jazz in 2019 who has several notable jazz recordings. “Jazz on Jay stands out as one of the most distinctive venues in our region. This unique setting enables musicians to connect with diverse audiences of all ages, expanding their reach beyond the confines of a traditional club, right in the heart of Downtown Schenectady.”

It took years to get the composition right. Back in the early 1990s, Schenectady Heritage Area Corridor Maureen Gebert of the City’s development office found funding through the Schenectady County Legislature. Former Mayor Karen B. Johnson brought the series under the auspices of the non-profit ElectriCity Arts and Entertainment District in 1994, which led to more funding opportunities.



Children of the Dadtset musicians before their Aug. 12, 2021 performance.



Colleen Pratt opens Jazz on Jay.

Schedules and locations changed over time; from Wednesdays to noon Thursdays, and from the State Street end of the Jay Street pedestrian mall, to its current home in Jay Square at 104 Jay St., opposite City Hall in 2024 where fans bring their own seating and refreshments. Robb Alley at Proctors (432 State St.) is the cozy indoor site when rain, extreme heat, or low air quality threaten. But enough about changes to days or location, Jazz on Jay is about the music.

Tim Coakley, the legendary Capital Region jazz historian and one of the first Jazz on Jay performers, says when concerts began in the 1980s it ran during Thursday evenings when stores would stay open late. “People would run into the Jay Tavern to get a drink between songs,” he said, adding with a laugh, “sometimes musicians would too.”

“I think when it moved to noontime, the musicians appreciated that because then they could get a gig somewhere else that night,” Coakley said.

Now moving into its fourth decade, with a few years off due to funding problems, Coakley says the future is bright for the series. “I think everything about this new Jay Square, is just about perfect,” Coakley said. “It’s so comfortable with people sitting on the grass, or bringing their own chairs, or being off to the side to dance.”

Longtime music journalist Michael Hochanadel calls the shows as he hears them. His review of an August performance started this way: “The only things that went wrong Thursday were a worst-possible-time rain storm; a last-minute venue change from Jay Square outdoors into Robb Alley at Proctors; a siren-noisy, flashing-lights fire drill and a lot of rambunctious crowd noise.”

The second sentence? “But, no problem: hard bop uplift by Terry Gordon’s Quintet simply overcame.”

And after 10 paragraphs explaining and praising the 10 original songs, the last sentence sums up the performance which had people on their feet:

“There’s a good reason these guys – whom Gordon recruited to play his originals in this quintet – are in such demand. Skilled individually, they know how to cook together and cruise at any tempo, to blend and burst out into space.”

FOLLOW HIS BLOG AT HOKESJUKEBOX.COM FOR PREVIEWS OF UPCOMING PERFORMANCES AS WELL AS REVIEWS.



The Peg Delaney Quartet plays to a capacity crowd on June 28, 2018 on the Jay Street pedestrian walkway.



July 12, 2018 - Karen B. Johnson and Jean Leonard enjoyed listening to the Azzaam Hameed Quartet





Tim Coakley plays the drums during this jazz concert in 1984. This photo is courtesy of John Papp.



Pete Tolgo from June 6, 2019 — bassist with Teresa Broadwell's group.

Jay Square, a public gathering space across from City Hall, became the new home of Jazz on Jay for the 2024 season. David Brickman of Albany, seated in the blue chair in the front row of the Jazz on Jay tent during the July 25 performance of the Awan Rashad Quartet, has been coming to every concert he can make for years. "The new soundstage in a nicely designed gathering space has enhanced the experience," Brickman said. "There's just nothing better than great music performed out in the sunshine for free."



June 5
The Dylan Canterbury Quintet
June 12
Todd Nelson and JazzAmericana

June 19
Steve Horowitz Quartet

June 26
Jeff "Siege" Siegel Quartet

July 3
Winelight

July 10
Jeanine Ouderkirk Quartet

July 17
Art D'echo Trio

July 24
Linda Brown Jazz Project

July 31
Nicholas Dwarika Quartet

August 7
Heard

August 14
The Evidence

August 21
Arch Stanton Quartet

August 28
Chuck Lamb Trio
featuring Ria Curley



JAZZ ON JAY

JAY STREET
NOON-1:30PM

Sponsored by



Council on
the Arts



County Legislature
Arts & Culture Grant



PROCTORS
Collaborative



The Schenectady
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Photographs in this section are from Peter R. Barber of the Daily Gazette, Vincent Giordano Photography and Rudy Lu Photography.

ARTISTS FACE THE MUSIC AT SPECIAL CONCERTS

While the main goal for Jazz on Jay is to showcase both established and emerging jazz musicians from the Capital Region, secondary goals are to increase awareness of jazz, the only uniquely American art form, and to provide high-quality free music in a fully accessible space.

When the COVID-19 pandemic shut down nearly all in-person concerts, Jazz on Jay found a way to continue the concerts safely for performers and the audience in 2020 and 2021. Among our diverse audience is a group of non-verbal fans, whose caregivers suggested adding a visual component to the music.

Of course, we said yes.

We agree that marrying the creativity of music with visual art is beyond cool.

Applications through the Upstate Coalition for a FairGame in 2023 and the Arts Center of the Capital Region in 2024 provided the funding for four artists to create paintings each year.

Follow Jazz on Jay on Facebook to learn about this year's Sound Palette projects when we announce them in the upcoming weeks.

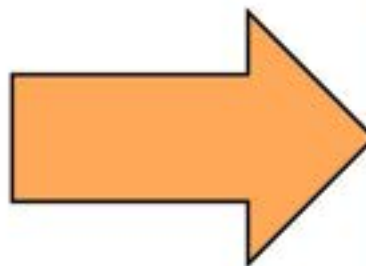


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